

Even In Silence

by drewbug

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Summary: A "missing scene" story, following the death of Kirk's brother in "Operation -- Annihilate"

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> <meta name="Generator"> I watch him sink into the padded chair in front his small desk

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By Nicole Clevenger (perfect_kiss@juno.com)

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Disclaimer: These boys aren't mine. I keep asking and asking, but Paramount hasn't given them to me. Still, I keep hoping. I'd take good care of them, I swearâ€¦ Anyway, for now I can only borrow them for a bit, and do my best to return them unharmed. I didn't intend to step on anyone's ownership toesâ€¦ And I'm not making any money off this. Really.

Please send comments. I adore feedback, even criticisms. Especially criticisms. Tell me how to make it better. 'Course, I won't object to any praises you'd like to send either *G* If anyone wants to archive this (stranger things have happened), feel free as long as my name stays attached.

I watch him sink into the padded chair in front his small desk. He unconsciously runs a hand through his sandy-brown hair as he stares at the computer screen before him. The room is cooler than normal, yet I can see beads of sweat at his hairline. He ignores me, as he has done since I first arrived. I have allowed this, silently watching him as he paced around the room, but I will be silent no longer. I approach him.

He does not turn as I rest a hand lightly on his shoulder. I study his profile, the lines that I know so well, the usually clear hazel eyes that are now bloodshot. Even through the fabric of his uniform I can feel the heat of his skin, the fever-warmth that is betrayed by his flushed cheeks radiates through my cooler, dry fingers. His eyes close for only a moment, and my hand moves toward his face, as if I could lower his body temperature with just a touch. But before I can brush my skin against his, his eyes open. My hand falls to my side, and I watch as he uses the armrests of the chair to push himself to his feet. He takes a few steps across the room, toward the door, as if he plans to leave me here alone in this dim-lighted room.

But he does not leave. He stops before reaching the sensors which will open the door automatically and let the outside world in to invade his precious few hours, minutes, seconds of solitary silence. I have already done this, of course, but he does not tell me to go. Perhaps he does not consider my presence to be an invasion. I flatter myself. Perhaps he merely does not have the energy to speak to me.

He leans heavily against one of the smooth white walls. His back is to me, and I study the uncharacteristic slump of the shoulders usually so broad and strong, as if they could " and did " support all of the burdens of the unfair universe. His arms dangle limply at his sides as if even to lift them would be too much of an effort.

A sudden fit of coughing shakes his body and interrupts my reverie. I wait for it to end, then get to my feet and move toward him. My black boots make no noise as I cross the room because I step lightly, not because there is much of a carpet to muffle their sound. I reach his side and see that his eyes are closed.

I want to run my hands over his back, take his arm, rest a hand on his shoulder, brush his hair back from his face. I do not touch him again.

I say his name softly, not much louder than a whisper. After a moment, the hazel eyes open. Yet he does not look at me, only gazes downward at the floor. This does not deter me, however, and I continue in the same quiet tone.

"You need to rest."

These are apparently the magic words. He straightens and turns to face me. "I'm fine," he says, in his best captain mode. I wonder if he is trying to convince me or himself. I again resist the urge to brush away the lock of sand-colored hair.

"The doctor says you must get some sleep."

"I have work to do."

"You are not on the bridge now. You do not have to act as if you are."

Almost imperceptibly, his shoulders slump again. I can see that he is about to protest, to deny that he knows what I mean. Another bout of coughing prevents the pointless words. When it stops, his back is against the wall and he has closed his eyes.

Now I do touch him. With a hand on his arm I say gently, "You are exhausted. You should be in bed." He opens his eyes but says nothing. I can not tell if agrees or is simply without the strength to argue any longer.

He lets me lead him slowly into the bedroom. Because he is a man of few possessions, it is sparsely furnished. The standard narrow bed is in one corner along the wall. Next to it is a long shelf with the intercom and another computer within easy reach of one lying on the bed. There are also old, hardcover books, a definite rarity in our world of technology. The only other piece of furniture in the room is a nonregulation, but extremely comfortable, stuffed chair that he once told me has been in the possession of his family for hundreds of years. He told me it was made of real leather, from the skin of an OldEarth animal known as a cow. I have never seen a cow.

I pull back the sheets on his bed. He sits on the edge and rubs his eyes wearily as I again kneel on the floor, this time to pull off his boots. The second one is a bit more difficult to remove than the first, but soon both are lying on the carpet beside the bed.

I stand, and he looks up at me. It is almost as if he is a doll, with no will of his own, for me to manipulate as I choose. It is a disconcerting image, since he is not one that anyone normally considers to be easily manipulated. I gently push him back onto the bed, swinging his legs up and pulling the blankets over his body. He looks like nothing so much as a sick child, a little boy with tousled hair lying feverish against the soft cool whiteness of the pillows.

His eyes begin to close, but they abruptly snap back open. The spell of sleep has almost enchanted him, but it is broken at the last minute by the weight of his endless responsibilities. They call to him, drowning out the siren-song of much needed rest. He sits up and moves to pull the sheets aside. "I can't sleep. There's too much I need to do."

"It will wait." I again push him back into the pillows. He looks as if he will rise again, but the physical and mental exhaustion close their hands around him. He fights as his eyes drift closed, feather lashes caressing flushed cheeks. "Can't sleep," he mumbles.

I run my fingers lightly over his hot skin. "Shhh..."

When I see that he is finally sleeping, I move away from the bed to sit in the chair made from the cows. It is a somewhat unpleasant thought, but it is the only chair in the room. I want to stay for a while, to see that he needs nothing. I sit in the chair with my eyes focused on the man in the bed. The chair is comfortable, and I am pleased to find that the spirits of the slaughtered animals do not speak to me. Perhaps it has been too long for them. I ignore the chair's comfort.

He stirs, but does not awaken. If the doctor is correct, this is the first time he has slept at all since the ship left the planet, roughly 40 hours ago. He probably got only minimal sleep before that, since our arrival there.

He is mourning the death of his only brother. There was no time to do so before. All of his attentions were focused on saving the lives of

his first officer, his nephew, the 4 billion inhabitants of the planet, and all those on the planets in the surrounding solar systems. A gargantuan responsibility for any man, leaving him no time to consider the loss of his brother and sister-in-law.

He is now forced to face it. Before the ship left orbit, he returned to the planet with his nephew, to the only home that the boy had ever known. He had collected the personal items of the family while the boy bid his parents and his former life goodbye. I was in the transporter room when they both returned, silent and solemn. I was there when the boy turned to him and said, "This is your fault. You could have saved them, and you didn't. You killed them." I was there to watch each word hit him like a thrown rock until the boy ran from the room. I saw the pain in his eyes that he tried bravely to conceal. I wanted to go to him, but I could not. It would not have been proper.

I spoke with the doctor almost a day later. He mentioned the insomnia as well as the refusal of any medication to help find sleep. The doctor also reported a worsening respiratory infection. Like a bad cold, it was nonfatal but certainly a discomfort. There was, however, some concern that it could develop into something more dangerous if ignored. The doctor prescribed antibiotics and rest. The latter, at least, was disregarded, and I was on the bridge when he arrived for his regular shift.

I was also on the bridge when the order came to us over subspace communications. We were instructed to divert from our previous flight plan, which would have taken us to Starbase Eight for rest and leave. We were told to head instead for deep space as part of an investigation of the disappearance of three different cargo and passenger ships. Strong possibility of pirates, but do not rule out other causes. Yet another emergency for us to fix, another mystery to solve.

He took the news in silent resignation. It was disturbing to see him show so little emotion. That is a role best played by certain others. He ordered the course change and a search for all information on the sector which was our new destination. He instructed it to be sent to his quarters, gave up control of the bridge, and entered the turbolift. It will be two days before we reach the mysterious sector of space.

He is mourning the death of his only brother in silence. No tears, no anger, no joy. The doctor considered relieving him from duty on physical and psychological grounds, but you cannot force a man to grieve. The doctor, I have been informed, is still keeping the option open.

The door signal buzzes, and the sleeping man mumbles something I do not understand. I hurry to answer the door before the buzzer sounds again and wakes him.

I open the door to see the doctor standing in the corridor. Instead of allowing him to come into the room, I join him outside. The door closes behind me with a whisper.

"I didn't know you would be here," the doctor says.

I have no real response to his statement of the obvious

circumstances. I am here. It matters not if he suspected my presence. "He is sleeping," I merely say. A nonanswer to a nonquestion.

"Finally." The doctor sighs with what I interpret to be relief. "How long?"

"A few minutes."

The doctor raises his eyebrows at my uncharacteristically vague answer, but says nothing. There is silence between us as we stand in the empty hallway.

He is the one to break the silence. "I just wanted to check on him, to try again to convince him to take a sedative. I guess that's not necessary now." He turns away from me to go, but then stops and looks back. "Oh, tell him when he wakes up that we found his nephew in the arboretum. The boy's temporary quarters are on Deck 6. Will you be here with him for a while?"

I nod. This is my rest period, and I am not tired. I have nowhere to go at the moment.

The doctor nods as well. "Take care of him. I'll be around to look in on him a bit later."

He walks away, and I reenter the room. When I step into the bedroom, I see that he has kicked the top blanket off the bed. Still mumbling, he twists his body and becomes further entangled in the thin sheet. I lift the blanket from the floor and carefully lie it over him again. He continues to murmur to himself.

I can not help him. There is nothing I can say to take away his pain. Nothing I can do will bring his brother back. I can not force his nephew to forgive him. I can not force him to forgive himself.

I can make him forget. It worked once before, on another world, with another death. I used my skills to help him forget the woman he had lost. I took away a memory that would have only caused him pain. But I did it without permission. An invasion that I have sworn to myself I will not repeat.

Besides, it would not work this time. There are too many others involved now, too many little reminders that would only serve to confuse and distress him when he could not place the event to which they refer. His nephew is here, with us. His mother will no doubt want to consult with him about the various arrangements for the dead, and to mourn with him.

More suffering he will have to go through. An irrational urge to protect him from that rises in me. I push it away, forcing myself to face things logically.

But I find that my logic falters where he is concerned.

Logic is the foundation of existence. It must be. I have not spent so much time here, away from my own kind, that I have lost my basic beliefs.

He would, of course, point out that these are my kind as well. And he

would not be wrong. At least genetically, I belong with these as well. But I can not allow myself to give up my control, to fall prey to illogical whims and unbridled emotions as they do. If I should, I would be lost.

I keep my own feelings hidden from the eyes of others. It is the way it must be. It is what they expect of me, what I expect of myself. It is the role I am to play in all of this. And I accept that role without question. It is who I am.

Those who know me best are occasionally allowed the briefest of glimpses into that other part of me, the hidden part. The man who lies on the bed before me, caught in a tormented sleep, is one of the few who has seen this part. We do not speak of it, except in those comments carefully veiled as jokes. To discuss this in any seriousness would be to go too far beneath the safety of the surface, into a place where neither of us is comfortable. We have seen things in each other that will never be mentioned, fears and agonies and delights. I see them in his ever-expressive hazel eyes, and I have no doubt that he sees them in me. For there are times that I am not as diligent in my control as I perhaps should be, and there are things to be seen in my darker eyes for those who know how to look.

He moans softly. The sound tears through me. I am at his bedside, looking down at him, wishing there was some way that I could reach out and smooth away the lines of anguish and distress that distort his features. I brush the lock of hair off his forehead. I let my fingers brush his skin, nearing the contact points that would enable me to take the memories and the sorrow away.

I blink, pulling back my hand as if I have been burned. I stare at my fingers in something akin to shock. What am I doing? Without thinking, I was about to do it, to invade and erase again. The idea repulses me, or does until I firmly remind myself that such disgust is an emotion. I sit lightly on the edge of the bed, but he does not awaken. Taking a deep, slow breath, I try to clear the lingering distaste away. I did not do it. I have kept my silent promise to him. Now I must get control, and see that I do not come close to doing anything like this again.

I run the smooth skin of my thumb over my fingertips, thinking. It is beyond unethical to enter someone's mind without their permission. Yet I have done it once. And I almost performed the act a second time. Yes, I did it to protect him. But that justification does not make it right. Am I a wretched, evil creature for what I have done? For something done with the best of intentions, something done within the bonds of friendship and love?

Enough. It does not matter now. What has been done is done. One cannot change the past. And I have already come to the conclusion that it shall not happen again. I cannot take his grief from him. I cannot erase the death of his brother. Death is a natural part of life; none is spared from it. And I have no right to try and take it away from him.

Perhaps I am selfish to even think of it. He is a strong man, and he will come through this. I know this to be true, yet part of me still cries out that I should do something to save him from the experience to come. I do not wish to see him hurting.

Selfish.

A faint beeping sound fills the silence of his quarters. It takes me but a moment to register where it is coming from, and then I rise from the bed. His computer has come to life, a small blinking light indicating the data he requested has arrived. With one small motion, I turn off the machine. As I said to him earlier, it will wait.

I consider calling the bridge to inform them that the captain is not to be disturbed. It would be a minor gesture, something I could do to help him, to give him what little time I can to deal with the things that he needs to face. But I do not. I know that the effort would not be appreciated. He is a private man when it comes to the area of his own feelings, just as every good leader is forced to be. I would be calling attention to his personal life, something that he does not want. The others would understand, I am certain, but that does not matter. All he would see is the weakness that would be displayed by the request for personal time. A captain is not supposed to need personal time. A captain is not supposed to be weak.

So he will suffer in silence, as is his way. He will, as always, go out of his way to ensure that no one is aware of his fatigue or pain or sorrow. He will hide it behind the mask he reserves for those times when he would falter, those times when he would be human. I have seen the transformation, the retreat behind the mask. And I have not commented on it. I have remained above the surface.

Yet I am here now. Not quite below the surface, but close enough that he would no doubt pull away from me were he cognizant enough to do so. I would be forced to pull back as well, to keep behind the walls I have constructed around myself. We would dance, as we do, around the issue of the emotions at hand. It is as much as we both can allow ourselves. Like our chess games, in a way. One move, then another to counter. Each trying to get inside the other's defenses, but constantly being held off. And accepting that imposed distance as part of the game. But always returning to play again, as if the next time might be different.

It cannot be any different. Unspoken knowledge, but inescapable all the same.

There is the sound of dry coughing from the adjacent room. I return there immediately. I feel the corners of my mouth pull down slightly with displeasure, and I hurriedly slide my own mask over my features before it is noticed.

"You should be sleeping," I remind him. I do not move from my position in the doorway, as if I am now questioning my own right to be here.

His eyes close for a moment, and I allow myself the indulgence of hoping that he has gone back to sleep. But then they open once more, blinking back the fingers of sleep that attempt to pull him under. He coughs again, and I see his wince as his sore throat is abraded further.

I move then, coming back to him with a glass of water. His eyes are on me as I approach, but he says nothing. I wonder if he really sees me. If not me, however, then what?

It does not matter. I hand him the glass, wondering if he needs my help to drink from it. But he takes it from me before I can even offer my assistance silently. Even in the grip of exhaustion and fever, he remains aware enough to insist on doing things such as this on his own. It does not surprise me.

I take the glass back from him when he seems to be done. There are water droplets on the sheets, on the front of his uniform tunic. He drags a hand sloppily across his face, wiping his mouth. I wonder for a moment how much of the liquid actually made it inside of him, as opposed to the amount that appears to be around him.

The simple effort of sitting up and drinking seems to have exhausted him further. He lays back against the pillows, eyes closed. I watch for a few minutes, waiting to hear his breath even out in sleep. I study his chest, seeing it rise and fall again and again, finding peace in this basic pattern. When I believe he is asleep, I turn to refill the water glass. I will keep it close, in case he needs it.

His voice whispers my name, and I turn back to him. His eyes are still closed, and I decide that it must have been a piece of a dream. I ponder in what context it is that I am found in his dreams.

I begin to leave, when he speaks again. His eyes remain closed, but I am now aware that he is not sleeping.

"There was a message? On the computer?"

His voice is rough, his words slow. But it is clear that he is conscious.

"Yes. The data you requested has arrived." It does not occur to me that I should lie to him. I doubt that I could even if it had.

A sigh, a soft sound of resignation, and his eyes open. He is looking at the ceiling. "So tiredâ€¦"

The words are almost mumbled, as if meant for no one to hear. His eyes appear unfocused, glittering with unnatural brightness in the dim light. I am unsure of what I should say. I find myself repeating words I have already said several times in the past hour. "You should rest. The information can wait." I suddenly do not know whether to use his given name or his earned title. I use neither.

He shakes his head, rolling it back and forth on the pillow. His eyes have closed again, and his words are barely audible. "Noâ€¦ the dreams. I have to be awakeâ€¦ No more dreamsâ€¦"

I am aware that these are words I am not meant to hear. Yet I stand here, silent witness to his fear. I set the forgotten glass on the floor as I kneel beside his bed.

Now I do use his given name, the name I rarely permit myself to use aloud. "You must rest. You are exhausted." Again my mind reminds me that these words have been used once before, that I am only replaying an old scene. I can not think of anything else to say to him, however. My only focus is on keeping him calm, on making him rest. If these overused hollow phrases will serve that end, then I will repeat them until my voice goes hoarse. If it will take away some of the

pain, I will do it.

He is trembling. I place my hand lightly on his arm, hoping to soothe him. But still I feel his body shaking under my sensitive fingers. Perhaps I should call the doctor.

I say as much to him, and his eyes snap open. "No, don'tâ€¦ I'm fine. Justâ€¦ cold." His eyes search my face, pleading almost. All of my internal shields are up against this contact, but his have been weakened. I know that he is afraid of the images in the dreams. But he must be strong. So he denies the fear, the symptoms, the problem. He denies the reason for the dreams, even to himself.

And I allow him to do so. I will not force him to face this.

I see what I can do for him. I see how I can help him, at least for the moment. It is not much, but it is something. Something I am most willing to do for him.

"Sleep," I whisper. "The dreams will not come again tonight."

There is doubt in those hazel eyes, but also a need to believe that what I say is the truth. He is too unwell to fight me. His body is demanding rest, even as his fear and sense of duty keep him awake. He must sleep sometime. His eyes drift closed.

My fingertips graze his skin, like the brush of a gossamer web across his warm forehead. My touch is virtually weightless, but it is enough to accomplish my goal. "Sleep," I murmur, this time more of a command. One that only his subconscious mind is meant to detect.

His face relaxes into unlined boyhood. His breathing evens out, deepening this time into slumber. He will get the rest he needs, finally. The haunting dreams will not return tonight, as I have promised. And I have not broken my own vow and entered his mind, merely tiptoed across the surface.

Perhaps later, when his body is well, I can aid him in the healing of his spirit. Perhaps not. I do not know if he will seek me out to be a part of his mourning, and I cannot go to him and offer my help. It would not be proper within the rules we have established. I must wait, wait in silence until he decides to come to me. I do not know if he will do this. But I will support him, in any way that I can.

I always do. Even in
silence.

End

perfect_kiss@juno.com

"Notâ€¦ *the* Spock. Captain Kirk's Spock?"

And now he did, in fact, lift an eyebrow, in a manner suggesting both curiosity and amusement. "I was unaware that I was considered his property."

-Star Trek: The New Frontier (Book 1)

Spock?

The syllable echoed in his mind. Blood-brother among the stars. The other half of the whole. The other part of the Trinity. The only other person She would accept in his life.

-Killing Time

â€|His inner eye saw gold and blue, merging and twining together, forming a union and a rapport. A perfect balance upon which starships were run.

-Killing Time

End
file.